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MEMORANDUM ON THE PRISONERS OF WAR STILL HELD IN YUGOSLAVIA

The Austrian and German press and radio have recently informed the public that the repatriation of prisoners of war from Yugoslavia has been practically completed, and that there are only a few stragglers left in Yugoslavia. This news dispatch even had a semi-official character. However, the truth is quite different.

There are indeed some prisoners of war in Yugoslavia who are sick and physically unfit for transport. There is also undoubtedly a limited number of skilled workers who occupy key positions in the Yugoslav industry and economy and who are being retained, more or less against their will. But besides these, there is a group of prisoners of war, numbering at least one thousand, whose fate cannot be dismissed by labeling them "just a few stragglers", for there are more than "just a few" close relatives waiting for their return.

Why are these men being held? The Yugoslavs will probably not bring up this question themselves, and will answer any inquiries by pointing out that these men are either suspects or witnesses in investigations or war crimes trials. This explanation is a lie.

It would be beside the point, and should also better be left for a later and more suitable time, to discuss the Yugoslav methods of jurisprudence in regard to the question of war crimes and to draw conclusions from this discussion. However, the following facts should be listed to prove the claim that the Yugoslav explanation for the holding of these prisoners of war is a lie:

- 1) Even one of the first major war criminals' trials at Belgrade made use of definitely rehearsed witnesses. For instance, one of the witnesses was a blind man, who, without even stopping to think, could tell the exact number of hand grenades which were thrown at him simultaneously, although he had already lost his sight when this incident occurred. At the same trial, another witness was able to identify one of the defendants at first glance, although he had seen him--according to his own testimony--only once before, five years

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before the trial, and in the dark and at a considerable distance, at that. (These data can be checked by reading the accounts of the trial against Colonel-General Loehr in "Borba", for the Yugoslavs a 100-percent reliable source). This trial took place in or about February 1947.

2) After a few public trials had been held, Yugoslavia refused to conduct the other war criminals' trials in public, although this must have been a difficult decision to make, since they had to forego the propaganda effect of these trials abroad and at home. However, if one examines the testimony mentioned above, it is not surprising that the Yugoslavs themselves were no longer convinced of the effectiveness of such trials.

If such means had to be employed even during the first trials in order to establish the guilt of the defendants, it becomes quite clear that those still held today as war criminals are anything but war criminals. Another indication of this is the fact that most of these men have not yet been given a hearing, or if they have, the interrogation was not concerned with their own affairs. In reality, these men have not been released because they are persons who, because of their social status or their political opinions, are disliked by the Communists.

For this reason more than one thousand men are held in captivity and many thousands of their family members are left to worry and wonder about their fate. And all this is done in the name of an ideology which has the temerity to proclaim that all existing phrases concerning human rights, freedom, and whatever other ideals there may be, are their own inventions, whereas their real ideology is nothing but class struggle and class hatred to the point of annihilation.

How these thousand men are treated now is not known. It is known, however, how the prisoners at Camp 227 at Zrenjanin were treated ^{up to} 18 January 1949, and it is known that most of the prisoners still being held were taken there. A thorough discussion

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of the camp and its methods would go too far, but a few random facts should suffice to show its character:

No Red Cross representative or any other foreign visitor has ever been to Camp 227. All requests by outsiders to visit or to inspect the camp have been turned down so far. This is quite understandable when it is remembered that the following incidents have occurred there:

1) Camp 227 has no sewer system. For this reason, the cesspool has to be emptied almost daily. Two prisoners were always detailed for this job. They had to load the contents of the cesspool on a carriage suitable for this purpose and empty it, under guard, outside of the camp. Sometime during the summer or fall of 1947 a camp supervisor came to the company of prisoners detailed to this job. When the two prisoners, who, as usual, had been picked previously for the detail, reported, he turned them down and, after a short search, selected the Lutheran Bishop of Braunschweig as the only man for the detail. (The Bishop of Braunschweig, Dr. Johnson, was captured as a reserve officer. It is worth noting--quite aside from the indignity of the entire affair--that he fulfilled his military service as a low-ranking officer in a subordinate post and still wound up in a special camp.) He never returned from this detail. The next day, his company and the whole camp were told that he had been shot "trying to escape". That is a lie.

The truth should not be difficult to guess, however. Bishop Dr. Johnson always spoke openly against the materialistic ideology, and had been prohibited from holding speeches and giving sermons at the camp quite some time prior to his murder. Because of an old leg injury, he could walk only with difficulty, using a cane. The Commander of Camp 227, Capt. Ilja Crncovic, surely should know who murdered the Bishop and why.

2) On 22 May 1943 [sic] General Gerhard Ruge was cleaning his mess kit near the window when he was shot down in broad daylight without warning by a rifle fired into his room. The Yugoslavs later stated that Ruge had been signaling from his window. Signals to whom? The

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true reasons for this murder may become more apparent, if it is considered that Bushne spent only the last five days of the war in Yugoslavia, and thus did not even have time to become a suspect to the Yugoslavs.

It need not even be mentioned that in a camp where murders are part of the procedure, hunger and beatings also play a role. However, the fact that there was no physician at all in the camp for months and months, and that a medical student who simply did not know enough about medicine to do any good worked as a "doctor" for several months, may surely be described as attempted murder. At the same time, many physicians who were prisoners of war were being used, against their own will, to treat the civilian population.

Camp 227 was not the only one of its kind. There was, and perhaps still is, a Camp 109, near Sabac. Who knows what went on there?

What is to happen now? ~~At~~ First, the public must be told the truth about the repatriation of prisoners from Yugoslavia being "practically concluded". Then the names of all those still held should be established. It should also be the duty of those repatriated, as comrades-in-arms, to supply the necessary factual data, which could be printed in order to make the Yugoslavs release each and every one of these men. It is hoped that the authorities will not shirk their duty toward citizens of their countries by claiming these men were war criminals or suspects. It should be reiterated that the men still held as prisoners in Yugoslavia are not war criminals.

The time must come eventually when such accusations, especially when they do not come from reliable sources, will no longer serve as a good reason to refuse to undertake any official action, as long as such accusations against Austrian and German citizens have not been proved.

And even if Austrian and German government authorities do not

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themselves have the necessary force to bring to bear on Belgrade, they are still in a position to collect the necessary data which could become documentary evidence in the hands of the Western Powers. The Western Powers, the United States, the UN and its affiliated organizations can then show whether they, too, only talk of justice and humanity, or whether the time has finally arrived in which human lives, even though they are "only" the lives of Germans and Austrians, are no longer just small items of bargaining between East and West.

To strengthen these statements, it should be mentioned that not only did these murders of prisoners of war in Yugoslavia which ^{have} ~~were~~ cited here occur, but that it can be safely said that each repatriate from Yugoslavia was the eyewitness of at least one premeditated murder. If to this is added the number of those who died from illness due to the inhuman treatment accorded them by the Yugoslavs, (the number of these deaths amounts to at least 25 percent of all those officially captured by the Yugoslavs), the result is a picture of horror which we cannot ignore if we still insist on being called human beings.

I personally am willing to swear to the truth of all statements made here and to give further extensive information ^{on} ~~of~~ the treatment of prisoners of war in Yugoslavia, if such information is requested. It should not be believed that these things can be ignored with a sympathetic shrug of the shoulders. No one who has not been a prisoner in a Communist country knows that the fate of these men is.

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